



Washington State Gambling Commission

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Sports Wagering

Gambling in Washington is illegal unless specifically authorized under the law. Two sports wagering activities are authorized, wagering between individuals and sports boards.

Brackets, office sports pools and fantasy sports are not authorized under the law. As an alternative, a sports board could be operated. If someone would like to have additional ways to bet on sports, they would need to contact their local legislator and ask that the law be changed to allow additional sports wagering activities.

Under Washington State law (RCW 9.46.0269), anyone who engages in any form of gambling or materially aids any gambling activity is guilty of the crime of "Professional Gambling" unless the law specifically authorizes the activity.

Sports wagering in Washington is authorized under two categories:

- 1) The agency's historical interpretation has been that sports wagering by individuals is allowed by **Player Exception** (RCW 9.46.0265). The requirements of this law include:
 - Only individuals may be involved in the activity;
 - Businesses cannot be involved in the activity;
 - Persons acting together or as partners cannot be involved in the activity. Based on a court case, if two individuals team up and form a "partnership" they no longer fall under the player exception law (Dodd v. Gregory, 34 Wn.App 638, 663 P.2d 161 (1983));
 - No one may receive any profit from the activity other than their gambling winnings; and
 - All players must participate on equal terms.
- 2) Sports Boards for both businesses and individuals (RCW 9.46.0335).

WHO IS INVOLVED IN THE WAGERING? Business vs. Individuals

The "player exception" law makes an important distinction between gambling that involves individuals (natural persons) and gambling which involves businesses (taverns, corporations, partnerships and other associations of persons). For the purposes of this brochure, the words "individuals" and "businesses" will be used to distinguish between these two categories.

BUSINESSES

Businesses may not be involved in sports wagering, except for sports boards as authorized in RCW 9.46.0335. This applies whether the business is directly involved in the wagering or is materially aiding the gambling activity. Examples of materially aiding would include allowing betting to take place at your business premises, providing supplies or equipment, arranging or operating the game, or inviting persons to play. For example, if a bookmaker is taking bets at your business and you do nothing about this, you are "materially aiding gambling." This is illegal for all involved and also jeopardizes your gambling license. RCW 9.46.0269(2) states that if a person having control over a premises (owners or managers) permits the premises to be used for the purpose of conducting illegal gambling activity, that person is considered engaging in professional gambling. If you allow this to happen, you may be subject to administrative charges against your gambling license.

INDIVIDUALS

Individuals may participate in sports wagering as long as only individuals are involved and no one makes any money other than their gambling winnings. Individuals may help arrange or facilitate the game; however, **they may not be paid any fee for doing so.**

For example, two people may bet \$20 on a football game, as long as the winner gets the entire \$20 from the loser and no one else profits from the transaction.

Individuals may also conduct sports boards when the special rules discussed under “Sports Boards” are followed.

Gambling licensees should be alert for any personal betting activities that occur on their licensed premises. Person to person wagers are allowed as long as:

- * The wagers are not being accepted as part of a business; and
- * An additional fee or “vig” is not charged for the opportunity to make a bet.

A VIGORISH MAKES IT ILLEGAL

Gambling is always illegal in Washington if anyone is taking a vigorish, “vig”, “juice”, fee, or any other form of payment beyond his or her winnings as a player.

For example, if you make a \$20 bet on a football game and, if you lose, have to pay a third party \$22 (or any amount greater than what you bet), this would be illegal. The extra \$2 is called the “vig” or “juice”. Even though this 10 percent fee may not sound like much extra, this “transaction fee” is what makes the activity illegal.

SPORTS BOARDS

Sports boards are authorized under Washington State law and strict rules must be followed when conducting them. **Both businesses and individuals may conduct sports boards.**

- Each business or individual may offer only one board on any single athletic event.
- The board must be divided into **100 squares**.
- You must charge **no more than one dollar** per square.
- Each player must be charged the same entry fee (up to one dollar per square).
- Each player picks a square and their name is written in the square.
- Numbers representing game scores are randomly assigned to each square.

It is not legal to have a sports board where you:

- * Have more than one board per athletic event;
- * Offer 10 squares, instead of 100; or
- * Charge more than one dollar per square.

Anyone operating a sports board should develop and post house rules regarding how the boards will be conducted. For example, a deadline for collecting prize money, winner identification and requirements for someone other than a winner to collect a prize, what will happen in the event of a tie and how to distribute the money if a winning square has not been sold.

The sports board must be available for inspection by anyone purchasing a chance, Gambling Commission agents or other law enforcement representatives.

These limitations apply to all sporting events equally (i.e. Super Bowl, Final Four, etc.).



For more information,
visit our website at www.wsgc.wa.gov

We encourage voluntary compliance.
For questions, please call or e-mail our
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**If you or someone you know
have a gambling problem call
800.547.6133**

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